

# Lahu language

**Lahu** (autonym: *Ladhof* [lɑʰxo˧]) is a Tibeto-Burman language spoken by the Lahu people of China, Thailand, Myanmar, Vietnam and Laos. It is widely used in China, both by Lahu people, and by other ethnic minorities in Yunnan, who use it as a *lingua franca*.<sup>[3]</sup> However, the language is not widely used nor taught in any schools in Thailand, where many Lahu are in fact refugees and illegal immigrants, having crossed into Thailand from Myanmar.<sup>[4]</sup>

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## Classification

The Lahu language, along with the closely related Kucong language, is classified as a separate branch of Loloish by Ziwo Lama (2012),<sup>[5]</sup> but as a Central Loloish language by David Bradley (2007).<sup>[6]</sup> Lahu is classified as a sister branch of the Southern Loloish branch in Satterthwaite-Phillips' (2011) computational phylogenetic analysis of the Lolo-Burmese languages.<sup>[7]</sup>

## Dialects

### Matisoff (2006)

Lahu	
Ladhof	
Native to	Yunnan, China; Thailand; Laos; Myanmar
Ethnicity	Lahu
Native speakers	600,000 (2007–2012) <sup>[1]</sup>
Language family	Sino-Tibetan <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>(Tibeto-Burman)<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Lolo–Burmese<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Loloish<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>(Lahoish)<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Lahu</b></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul>
Writing system	Latin script
Official status	
Official language in	Lancang Lahu Autonomous County, Yunnan
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	Variously: lhu – Lahu lhi – Lahu Shi lkc – Kucong
Glottolog	laho1234 (http://glottolog.org/resource/laquoid/id/laho1234) <sup>[2]</sup>

A few dialects are noted, which are each known by a variety of names:<sup>[8]</sup>

- **Lahu Na** (Black Lahu, Musser Dam, Northern Lahu, Loheirn)
- **Lahu Shi** (Yellow Lahu, Kutsung); the divergent *la ʏxu ʋ swɪ* dialect is spoken in Nanduan 南段村 (Lahu: *na ʋtɔ ʔ*) Village, Nuofu Township 糯福乡, Lancang County, China<sup>[9][10]</sup>
- **Lahu Nyi** (Red Lahu, Southern Lahu, Musseh Daeng, Luhishi, Luhushi), Shehleh
- **Lahu Shehleh**

## Pham (2013)

Phạm Huy (2013:13) lists the following 3 branches.

- **La Hủ Phu** (White Lahu): only found in Lüchun County, Yunnan, China
- **La Hủ Năk** (Black Lahu)
- **La Hủ Nê Thu**

## Yunnan (1998)

Yunnan (1998:280)<sup>[11]</sup> lists 5 Lahu dialects.

- **Lancang** (*standard*) dialect 澜沧标准音区片 (in most of Lancang, Ximeng, Menglian, Cangyuan, and Shuangjiang counties)
- **Nanmei** dialect 南美土语群片 (in Nanmei Township 南美乡, Lincang County; Gengma County, and other nearby areas)
- **Mojiang** dialect 墨江土语群片 (in Pu'er, Simao, Mojiang, Xinping counties, etc.; Lahu Shi)
- **Menghai** dialect 勐海土语群片 (in Menghai, Jinghong, Mengla, Lancang counties (in Jiujing 酒井, Yakou 雅口, Qianliu 谦六 townships, etc.); Lahu Shi)
- **Jinping-Lüchun** dialect 金绿土语群片 (in Jinping and Lüchun counties)

Traditionally Lahu folk taxonomy splits the Lahu people into the two groups of Black Lahu and Yellow Lahu; Red Lahu and White Lahu are new dialect clusters originating in messianic movements within the past few centuries.<sup>[12]</sup> Black Lahu is the standard dialect in China,<sup>[3]</sup> as well as the lingua franca among different groups of Lahu in Thailand.<sup>[4]</sup> However, it is intelligible to speakers of Yellow Lahu only with some difficulty.<sup>[3]</sup>

## Bradley (1979)

Based on the numbers of shared lexical items, Bradley (1979) classifies the Lahu dialects as follows:<sup>[13]</sup>

### Common Lahu

- Black Lahu
  - Shehleh
  - (Core)

- Black Lahu proper
- Red Lahu
- Yellow Lahu
  - Bakeo
  - Banlan

## Lama (2012)

Lama (2012) gives the following tentative classification for what he calls *Lahoid*.

### Lahoid

- **Lahu-Xi** (Yellow Lahu)
- (Black Lahu cluster)
  - **Lahu-Na** (Black Lahu)
  - **Lahu-Ni** (Red Lahu)
  - **Lahu-Pu** (White Lahu)
  - **Lahu-Shehleh**

## Jin (2007)

Jin Youjing (2007)<sup>[14]</sup> classifies the Lahu dialects as follows.

- **Lahu Na 拉祜纳** (Black Lahu 黑拉祜): about 80% of all Lahu
  - *Xia'nanxian 下南现* (Nanling Township 南岭乡) dialect
  - *Dongkahe 东卡河* (Laba Township 拉巴乡) dialect
- **Lahu Xi 拉祜西** (Yellow Lahu 黄拉祜): about 20% of all Lahu
  - *Northern dialect*: Donghe 东河, Xincheng 新城, Qianliu 谦六, Wendong 文东, Fudong 富东, and Dashan 大山 townships
  - *Central dialect*: Yakou 雅口, Qianmai 谦迈, and Yingpan 营盘 townships
  - *Southern dialect*: Southern Nuofu 糯福(南), Northern Nuofu 糯福(北), and Huimin 惠民 townships
- **Lahu Alai 拉祜阿莱**: located in Alai Dazhai 阿莱大寨, Fubang Township 富邦乡, Lancang County and a few other nearby villages
- **Kucong 苦聪**: located in Jinping, Lüchun, Zhenyuan, and other counties

Jin Youjing (1992)<sup>[15]</sup> covers Lahu linguistic geography and dialectology in detail.

## Heh (2008)

Heh (2008)<sup>[16]</sup> lists Lahu Shi (Yellow Lahu) dialects as:

- **Mikeng**
- **Nakeo**
- **Lahu Aga** (also called Aphubele; spoken in Laos)
- **Bakeo**
- **Balan**

**Lahu Aga** was classified as Lahu Shi by Bradley (1979), but Heh (2008) found that it is actually linguistically closer to Lahu Na (Black Lahu). In Laos, there are about 9,000 Lahu Aga located in Bokeo Province (Tonpheung district, Muang Muang district, Houj Xai district, and the special region of Nam Yut) and Luang Namtha Province (Vieng Phoukha district, Boten district, and Muang Long district) (Heh 2008:161). In Laos, the Lahu Aga are most numerous in Tonpheung district (in Baan Dong Keap, Baan Sam Sip, Baan Khi Lek, Baan Beu Neong, Baan Hoe Ong, and Baan Nan Fa villages) and Vieng Phoukha district (in Baan Na Kat Tai, Baan Na Kat Neua, Baan Pamak, Baan NaNoi, Baan NaVa, Baan NaPhe, and Baan Na Shin villages) (Heh 2008:161-162). The Yellow Lahu are also called Lahu Kui Lung in Laos (Schliesinger 2003:110), with *Kui* meaning 'people'. There are about 21 Lahu Aga villages in Bokeo and Luang Namtha provinces, including in Ban Don Keao, Bokeo, and Ban Na Kat Neua, who had originally migrated from Yunnan, China. (Heh 2008:8). There are also 11 Lahu Aga families living in Baan Son Pu Nong, Chiang Saen District, Chiang Rai Province, Thailand. Heh (2008) provides comparative Lahu Aga dialectal data for:

- Na Kat Neua village, Vieng Phoukha district, Luang Namtha province
- Don Keao village, Tonpheung district, Bokeo province
- Na Kha village, Muang Muang Township, Bokeo province

## Sound changes

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Lama (2012) lists the following sound changes from Proto-Loloish as Lahu innovations.

- \*s- > x-
- \*z- > ʈ-
- \*ŋ- > x-

## See also

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- Kucong language

## Notes

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1. Lahu (<https://www.ethnologue.com/18/language/lhu/>) at *Ethnologue* (18th ed., 2015)  
Lahu Shi (<https://www.ethnologue.com/18/language/lhi/>) at *Ethnologue* (18th ed., 2015)  
Kucong (<https://www.ethnologue.com/18/language/lkc/>) at *Ethnologue* (18th ed., 2015)
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3. Gordon 2005, Lahu ([http://www.ethnologue.com/show\\_language.asp?code=lhu](http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=lhu))
4. Reh 2005
5. Lama, Ziwo Qiu-Fuyuan. 2012. *Subgrouping of Nisoic (Yi) Languages* ([https://uta-ir.tdl.org/uta-ir/bitstream/handle/10106/11161/Lama\\_uta\\_2502D\\_11591.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://uta-ir.tdl.org/uta-ir/bitstream/handle/10106/11161/Lama_uta_2502D_11591.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)). Ph.D. thesis, University of Texas at Arlington.

6. Bradley, David. 2007. East and Southeast Asia. In Moseley, Christopher (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the World's Endangered Languages*, 349-424. London & New York: Routledge.
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8. Matisoff 2006, p. xiii
9. *Lahuyu Jianzhi* 拉祜语简志 (1986)
10. <http://www.ynszxc.gov.cn/villagePage/vIndex.aspx?departmentid=111373>
11. Yunnan Gazetteer Commission [云南省地方志编纂委员会] (ed). 1998. *Yunnan Provincial Gazetteer, Vol. 59: Minority Languages Orthographies Gazetteer* [云南省志. 卷五十九, 少数民族语言文字志]. Kunming: Yunnan People's Press [云南人民出版社].
12. Bradley 1979, p. 41
13. Bradley 1979, p. 159
14. Jin Youjing [金有景]. 2007. "Guanyu Lahuyu de fangyan" [关于拉祜语的方言]. *Minzu Yuwen* 民族语文 2007:3.
15. Jin Youjing 金有景, et al. 1992. 中国拉祜语方言地图集 = Cokawr Ladhof khawd fayer diqthurcir = the linguistic atlas of Lahu in China. Tianjin: Tianjin she hui ke xue yuan chu ban she 天津社会科学出版社.
16. Heh, Sa Mollay Kya. 2008. ;A sociolinguistic comparison of Lahu Aga with Lahu Na. *Master's thesis*.

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## Further reading

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## External links

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- [Lahu Bible \(https://web.archive.org/web/20080321030304/http://www.myanmarbible.com/bible/Lahu/html/index.html\)](https://web.archive.org/web/20080321030304/http://www.myanmarbible.com/bible/Lahu/html/index.html) at the [Wayback Machine](#) (archived March 21, 2008)
  - [Radio Soap Opera in Lahu Language \(http://www.unescobkk.org/index.php?id=1205\)](http://www.unescobkk.org/index.php?id=1205)
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